

Research on the Expression of Ethnic Culture and the Construction of Cultural Identity in Animation Narrative

Zhuo Zhao

Liaoning Communication University, Shenyang, China

Abstract

Animation plays an important cultural function in the global communication pattern. As a deep resource of animation creation, national culture's expression in the narrative is directly related to the construction effect of cultural identity. The spiritual core of national culture is often precipitated in specific symbol systems, behaviour patterns and values. After these structural elements enter the field of animation narrative, they need to be reconstructed through narrative logic to realise the activation of effective cultural expression and cultural identity. The article sorts out the three basic types of surface symbols, middle behaviours and deep concepts of national cultural expression in animation, and analyses the narrative strategy of national cultural expression from the four dimensions of narrative theme, narrative structure, narrative symbol and narrative perspective. The study found that animated narrative systematically constructs and strengthens the audience's sense of cultural belonging, collective memory, cultural self-confidence and cultural identity extension through mechanisms such as symbol recognition, emotional resonance, value transmission and cross-media linkage. The study believes that the expression of national culture in the animation narrative should go beyond the symbolic borrowing at the formal level, go deep into the narrative texture, and realise the organic integration of cultural spirit and narrative art.

Keywords

Animation narrative, national culture, cultural identity, narrative strategy, symbol coding.

1. Introduction

The global practice of animation creation shows that animation art has gone beyond the simple function of entertainment and has evolved into an important medium form that carries cultural values and participates in the production of social significance. The fictional nature of animation gives it a great degree of freedom of expression, enabling it to present cultural materials in a condensed and imaginative way. The animation narrative integrates the plot promotion of the time dimension with the visual presentation of the space dimension, providing a unique carrier for the comprehensive output of cultural information. In the contemporary context of increasingly frequent cross-cultural exchanges, the expression of national culture in animation works has risen from a spontaneous aesthetic tendency to a conscious cultural strategic choice[1-2]. This expression practice enriches the vocabulary system of animation at the artistic level and responds to the urgent need to protect cultural diversity in the process of globalisation at the cultural and political level. The construction of cultural identity depends on the individual's identification, internalisation and emotional attachment to a specific cultural symbol system. The animation narrative happens to provide a fictional field for systematic cultural information input. The cultural expression strategy and identity construction effect in this field constitute an academic issue worthy of in-depth investigation. This study regards animation narrative as a dynamic meaning production

process, and explores the transformation mode of national cultural elements in this process and its shaping role on the cultural identity of the audience.

2. The Basic Types of Ethnic Cultural Expression in Animation

The hierarchical theory of cultural anthropology provides an analytical framework for understanding the expression of national culture in animation. The distinction between material culture, institutional culture and spiritual culture projects a clear hierarchy in the field of artistic expression, Table I. The surface expression focusses on cultural symbols at the visual and auditory levels. Such symbols are intuitively recognisable and constitute the most direct label of the national cultural identity of animation works. Architectural forms, clothing patterns, traditional colour systems, national musical instruments and folk music melodies all belong to this category. Middle-level expression is reflected in the presentation of behaviour patterns and social norms in a specific cultural background. The interpersonal etiquette of animated characters, the process of festival ceremonies, family structure relationship and occupational division of labour all carry specific cultural logic. It deeply expresses the spiritual core of national culture, involving values, cosmic pictures and survival wisdom. The understanding of the relationship between man and nature in animation narrative, the setting of the ideals of heroes and mortals, and the philosophical thinking about the cycle of life and historical changes all belong to this level of expression. The three levels are not isolated from each other, but have an inherent connection. Surface symbols are often used as material carriers of middle-level behaviour, while middle-level behaviour is often the concrete practice of deep-level ideas. The complete expression of national culture in animated works usually needs to mobilise and integrate the above-mentioned different levels of cultural elements, so that they can form a synergy in the narrative process, and finally build a hierarchical and internally self-coordinated cultural representation system.

Table 1. The three-layer structure of national cultural expression in animation

Expression Levels	Forms of Expression	Content
Surface Expression	Visual and Auditory Cultural Symbols	Architectural forms, patterns in traditional clothing, color systems, timbres of ethnic instruments, folk music melodies
Intermediate Expression	Patterns of Behavior and Social Norms	Social etiquette, ceremonial processes of festivals, family structures and relationships, occupational division of labor
Deep Expression	Values and Spiritual Core	Understanding of the relationship between humans and nature, ideals of personality, philosophical reflections on life cycles and historical change

3. Strategic Analysis of National Cultural Expression in Animation Narrative

3.1. Nationalisation Choice of Narrative Theme

In the long-term historical evolution, different civilisation systems have accumulated their own core concerns and spiritual themes, which constitute the most condensed narrative expression form of national culture. Western animation often takes individual redemption or self-realisation as the core theme, while Eastern animation is more inclined to present themes such as family ethics, collective survival or natural harmony. The nationalisation choice of the main theme is not a simple subject replacement, but a projection of the cultural worldview at the narrative level. The animated narrative produced in the context of agricultural civilisation, the contradictory setting often revolves around land, season and family, and these issues are born in the survival structure of agricultural society. The theme of the animated narrative under the

influence of nomadic culture may pay more attention to migration, encounter and survival strategies, reflecting the value orientation under the mobile lifestyle[3-4]. The use of nationalisation themes prompts animated stories to carry specific cultural genes at the starting point, which affect the possible path of subsequent plot development and the final form of the character's fate. The establishment of the narrative theme delimits the basic framework for the cultural expression of the whole work, and the subsequent organisation of all narrative elements needs to seek self-coordination within this framework. The choice of nationalisation of the theme is also a preliminary embodiment of the cultural position and cultural consciousness of the animation creator, which determines the basic posture of the work in cross-cultural communication.

3.2. Cultural Logic of Narrative Structure

The animated narrative dominated by the linear structure emphasises the continuous advancement of events and the clear closure of the causal chain. This structure is more in line with the emphasis on teleology and progressive views in the Western classical narrative tradition. Under the influence of oriental culture, animated narratives often adopt non-linear, parallel or loop structures, which correspond to the cyclical and indestructive time concept in Eastern philosophy. The cultural logic of the narrative structure of animation is also reflected in the way of conflict resolution. Some cultural traditions tend to end the conflict through confrontational struggle, so their narrative structure is presented as a classic model of rising conflict and decisive climax. Other cultural traditions pay more attention to harmony and balance, and their narrative structure may introduce compromise factors before the conflict reaches its peak, making the story tend to be integrated rather than broken. The narrative rhythm is also dominated by cultural logic. Some cultures prefer the aesthetic experience of calmly narrating and gradually entering a good state, and the narrative time consumed by the animation narrative at the beginning is significantly extended. The cultural logic in the narrative structure is often not directly perceived by the audience, but continues to shape the audience's internal judgement on the rationality of the development of the story, thus forming the deep grammar of national cultural expression, which regulates the narrative expectations and understanding framework of the audience in a subtle way.

3.3. Cultural Coding of Narrative Symbols

Semiotic theory reveals that culture is essentially a shared symbol system. Semiotic theory holds that signs do not convey meaning that is inherent in the object being represented. Semiotics is a method of studying communication that focuses on all types of communication rather than just spoken or written language. The process of animation creators transforming national cultural elements into narrative symbols is a coding operation under the domination of specific cultural grammar rules. Colour symbols carry very different meanings. The same colour may be associated with festive auspiciousness in different cultures, or may refer to dangerous mourning. Spatial symbols have also undergone the transformation of cultural coding. The presentation of spatial images such as courtyards, ancestral halls and markets is not only a reproduction of the physical environment, but also a symbolic expression of the division of public and private domains, family authority structure and community interaction mode. The classic animation "The Great Haunting of the Palace" integrates the opera face modelling into the character's facial design. As shown in Figure 1, the programmed soundtrack of the Beijing opera civil and martial arts field is transplanted into an auditory symbol system, and the character's dress is decorated with reference to the traditional costume form and colour symbol, thus systematically coding the national cultural resources into the visual and auditory of animation. Narrative symbol. Sound symbols cover the choice of character language style, folk instrument tone and environmental sound effect. Its coding is based on the confirmation of specific cultural hearing habits. The cultural coding of action

symbols is reflected in the speed, amplitude and rhythm characteristics of the character's body language[5-6]. The effectiveness of coding depends on the degree of sharing of cultural context between the encoder and the decoder. When the audience can accurately identify and understand the rules of symbol coding, the cognitive basis of cultural identity can be initially established, providing operable media materials and perception entrance for subsequent identity construction.



Figure 1. Zhu Lingyu of Beijing Opera "The Great Haunting of the Heavenly Palace"

3.4. Cultural Position of Narrative Perspective

Narrative theory points out that the choice of narrative perspective is not only related to technical narrative strategies, but also to the cultural identity of the narrator to view and tell the story world. The omniscient perspective gives the narrator overall control over the story world. The animated narrative from this perspective often presents a cultural perspective and comprehensively shows the behavioural logic of each character. The restrictive perspective limits the narrative power to a specific character, and the audience observes the story world through the cultural filter of the character. Different cultural positions give rise to differentiated perspective preferences. Cultural traditions that emphasise collective cognition tend to adopt omniscient or external perspectives to present the full picture of events. Cultural traditions that focus on individual experience prefer internal perspectives to deeply explore the psychological truth of the characters. The cultural position is also reflected in the narrator's evaluation of the story events. The degree of intervention of the narrator, the emotional tone of the evaluation and the value standards on which it is based all reflect the judgement mode of a specific culture. Some animation narratives adopt external perspectives to guide the audience to re-examine the cultural phenomenon they take for granted with the method of cultural strangeness. The cultural position of the narrative perspective affects the sense of distance between the audience and the story world, thus adjusting the path and intensity of cultural identity construction. The choice of perspective ultimately determines the presentation posture of national culture in the narrative, that is, different forms such as cultural self-examination, cultural self-confidence expression or cultural reflection and questioning.

4. Construction Mechanism of Animation Narrative and Cultural Identity

4.1. Symbol Recognition on the Construction of Cultural Belonging

The starting point of cultural identity lies in the individual's confirmation of his own cultural identity, and this confirmation depends on the familiarity and identification of the cultural symbol system[7]. The animation narrative just provides a dense and situational symbol field for this identification process. When the audience identifies the familiar symbols in their own cultural background in the animated text, a potential sense of cultural confirmation will be triggered. The sense of confirmation strengthens the audience's psychological connection with the cultural group to which they belong. The symbols in the animation narrative do not exist in isolation, but are embedded in the story process, and the identification process occurs synchronously with the plot progress. This narrative presentation reduces the deliberate sense of symbol recognition, so that the construction of cultural belonging is naturally completed in entertainment acceptance. Symbol recognition is especially important for audiences who are on the edge of culture or in a mixed culture. The vivid and systematic national cultural symbols in the animation provide them with a symbolic return path to cultural roots. The construction of cultural belonging is not only about comfort and safety at the emotional level, but also about the establishment of cultural subjectivity. When the audience can continue to identify and understand the symbol system of their own culture in the animation narrative, an affirmative cultural self-image will gradually form, which constitutes a solid cornerstone of cultural identity and provides psychological preparation and cognitive prerequisites for deeper cultural internalisation.

4.2. Activation of Collective Memory by Emotional Resonance

The preservation and transmission of collective memory not only depends on literature and education, but also emotional resonance often constitutes the driving force to activate memory and maintain its vitality. Animation narrative shows unique media advantages in this regard. Animation creates a scene that can stimulate the audience's emotional response through plot arrangement and characterisation. A combination of visual, auditory, and narrative strategy elements can arouse emotional fluctuations and sympathetic responses in the audience. If the scene fits the common historical experience of a specific cultural group, it will trigger a strong emotional resonance. As shown in Figure 2, the emotional response data of the audience of "Snow Child" verifies the effectiveness of this mechanism. The film tells the story of the snowman melting to save the rabbit. Since its broadcast in 1980, it has continued to cause intergenerational resonance. Countless viewers express the sad experience of childhood watching in their memories[8-9]. This emotional response comes from the collective emotional confirmation of the cultural and ethical core of "sacrificing oneself for others". Collective memory is not a simple copy of objective history, but a symbolic picture that has been screened and reconstructed by the cultural framework. The presentation of collective memory in the animated narrative has also undergone an artistic selection and reorganisation process. The resonance not only activates the individual's memory of past experience, but also activates the perception of the common destiny of the group. The emotional resonance in the animation narrative also has the function of intergenerational transmission. Young audiences can contact the emotional narrative that carries collective memory through animation, and can establish emotional connections with their own cultural traditions in the absence of direct historical experience. Emotional resonance opens up the emotional channel to cultural identity, making up for the shortcomings of pure rational persuasion in emotional rooting.

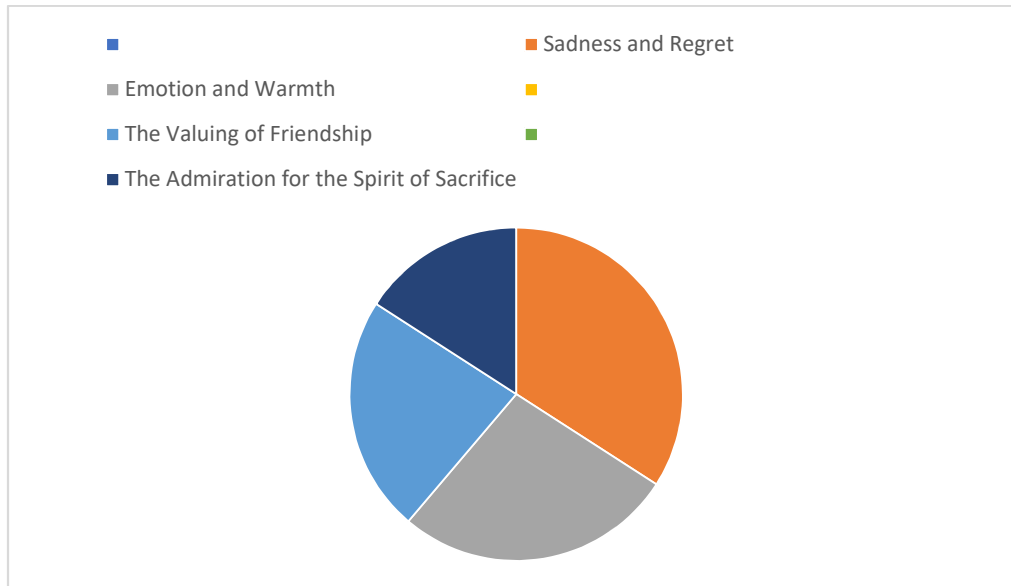


Figure 2. Distribution of emotional reaction types of the audience of "Snow Child"

4.3. The Cultivation of Cultural Self-confidence through Value Transfer

The generation of cultural self-confidence requires not only the display of external cultural achievements as a support, but also the recognition of the internal value system as the foundation. Animation narratives have unique effects in the concrete presentation and subtle transmission of value concepts. Value transmission occurs in the narrative process in which animated characters face choices, take action and bear the consequences. In the process of following the character to experience the story, the audience implicitly contacts and internalises the value guidelines on which the character's behaviour is based. The advantage of animated narrative over sergical value communication is that the value concept is wrapped in a specific situation, and its acceptance process avoids the psychological resistance that may be directly instilled. The core value concepts in national culture, such as patriotism, integrity and benevolence, the unity of heaven and man, etc., are concretely expressed through the fate trajectory of animated characters. When these values guide the characters to overcome difficulties and achieve growth, the audience's sense of identity with the value concept itself will also be enhanced accordingly. The cultivation of cultural self-confidence requires individuals not only to know the value proposition of their own culture, but also to form an affirmative evaluation of their own culture in value comparison[10]. By presenting the effectiveness of cultural values in the fictional world, animated narrative indirectly provides the audience with the basis for this positive evaluation. The effect of value transmission depends on the artistic transformation ability of the value concept of the animation narrative. This transformation ability determines whether the value concept can truly touch the internal value system of the audience, thus promoting cultural self-confidence to sink from the cognitive level to the belief level, and realising the transformation from external culture to internal value belief.

5. Conclusion

In summary, there is a deep and organic linkage between the expression of national culture and the construction of cultural identity in the animation narrative. The spiritual core of national culture realises the path generation from abstract concepts to perceptible text through the systematic transformation of narrative themes, narrative structure, narrative symbols and narrative perspectives. Animation narrative not only provides an artistic presentation carrier for national culture, but also promotes cultural identity from cognitive activation to emotional

rooting and extending from individual confirmation to group connection through multiple mechanisms such as symbol recognition, emotional resonance, value transmission and cross-media extension. Research reveals that the effectiveness of national cultural expression in animation narrative depends on whether cultural elements can be deeply embedded in the narrative texture and become the internal logic that drives the plot development and character growth. Only when the spiritual orientation of national culture and the artistic laws of animation narrative reach a deep isomorphism, can animated works achieve an effective balance between aesthetic experience and value transmission, provide continuous and profound intrinsic support for the construction of cultural identity, and earnestly undertake the dual mission of cultural inheritance and innovation in the contemporary media environment. .

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